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ABSTRACT

To explore the dimensions of credibility and physical attractiveness in a public relations setting, the impact of public relations (PR) spokesperson physical attractiveness--as operationalized as photographs of the spokesperson attached to a press release--on perceptions of both the writer's and the organization's credibility was examined. Subjects, 140 students enrolled in communication courses at a large southeastern university, randomly placed in one of six experimental groups or in the control group, were asked to evaluate the public relations release reportedly written by either a male or female "J. Smith" exhibiting one of three predetermined levels of attractiveness. The experimental groups read the press release and saw a photograph of "J. Smith"; the control group read the same release but did not see a photo. Subjects then rated the spokesperson, "J. Smith," on scales measuring source attraction, credibility, and distraction. Additionally, they responded to a 10-item questionnaire concerning perceptions of the organization sponsoring the press release. Results indicated that (1) the PR spokesperson's level of attraction did make differences in readers' perceptions of source credibility, but that such effects were a product of the interaction of spokesperson sex and the sex of the reader; and (2) where sex of reader and sex of spokesperson were concerned, cross-sex pairings yielded more positive reactions than did same-sex pairing. (Four tables of data are included, and 22 references are appended.) (MS)

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THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND SPOKESPERSON SEX ON PERCEIVED SOURCE AND ORGANIZATION CREDIBILITY

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THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND SPOKESPERSON SEX ON PERCEIVED SOURCE AND ORGANIZATION CREDIBILITY

Abstract

The impact of PR spokesperson physical attractiveness -- as operationalized as photographs of the spokesperson attached to a press release -- on perceptions of both the writer's and the organizations credibility was examined. From a violations of expectations/distraction rationale it was predicted that the spokesperson's level of attraction and sex would produce different ratings of the public relations release and such effect would generalize to the organization. Results indicated that PR spokesperson's level of attraction did make differences in readers perceptions of source credibility, but that such effects were a product of the interaction of spokesperson sex and the sex of the reader. This was most obvious with reader perceptions of the organization, where seven of ten variables yeilded significance. Where sex of reader and sex of spokesperson were concerned, cross-sex pairings yielded more positive reactions than did same-sex pairing. Discussion centered around the role of attraction and the use of photographs in public relations, the impact of reader and spokesperson sex, and potential PR strategy based on the findings.

THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND SPOKESPERSON SEX ON PERCEIVED SOURCE AND ORGANIZATION CREDIBILITY

A popular adage in our culture is that "beauty is only skin deep." Although this may be true in a literal sense, if attributions are made about an individual's personality or character because of good looks, the saying may not hold true. Past research has suggested a positive correlation between perceived physical attraction and message source credibility. Many researchers believe that an individual may be accepted or rejected on the basis of his/her perceived physical attractiveness. Thus, an individual's effectiveness may be partially the result of his/her physical attractiveness and in today's society physical attractiveness may be of importance to those in the business community. For example, public relations professionals deal with many people on both short- and long-term occasions, and image may have an impact on their effectiveness and persuasibility on behalf of their organizations.

The underlying purpose of this study is to explore the dimensions of credibility and physical attractiveness in a public relations setting. The results, if conclusive, may provide information on the salience of credibility and image for the practitioner, and help establish guidelines for effectiveness in dealing with various publics. If liking is truly a factor in establishing credibility, the attractiveness of the individual may prove to be a deciding factor in the affinity-seeking process.

Using inductive logic, one may assume that what is good for the individual is good for the whole. More clearly, if, in fact, an individual's credibility is affected by his attractiveness, will the effect be generalized to the organization that the person represents? For instance, if a PR practitioner is liked, trusted, and seen as a credible source of information, will the influenced receiver generalize and view the organization for which the individual works in the same manner?

A common misconception about public relations is that it is only "behind-the-scenes" publicity. There are many instances where the practitioner or organizational spokesperson is visible to one or more publics. To generalize or define the target receivers of public relations messages would be nearly impossible due to the diversity within the profession and with the situational opportunities which may arise. Press conferences where the practitioner faces the public; lobbying, with its concomitant personal contact; and press releases are but a few of the situations where the practitioners "meets" with the public.

Of these situations, however, we are interested in the press release as a form of public relations. In particular, we are interested in the effects of the sometimes accompanying practitioner photograph and its effect on message and organizational acceptance. The central assumption here is that the persuasibility of the individual practitioner is of great importance. However, Chaiken (1979) has argued against the use of photographs as a reliable source for determining overall attractiveness and credibility, both important features of persuasion. In fact, a great many organizations use writer's photographs in their accompanying press releases, as do professional journals such as PR Quarterly and PR Journal. What impact do such photographs actually have? If Seligman et al. (1974), are correct in assuming that attractive people are less likely to be blamed for bad outcomes, an attractive practitioner may be more effective in dealing with these publics and in various modes and media. It may be that the photograph establishes an expectation as to the position of the accompanying message; it also may be that the attractiveness of the source enhances perceptions of credibility.

Though attractiveness and credibility are subjective attributions, the effect of one on the other may illicit some tangible results. The purpose of this study was to extend previous research on the effects of physical attractiveness on source credibility to the public relations setting. By examining the impact of the public relations practitioners' physical

attractiveness, we may gain insight into the most effective ways to enhance the practitioner's perceived credibility.

Credibility

Wenburg and Wilmot (1973) defined credibility as "the degree of believability or acceptability a receiver gives to a source" (p. 140). They make the assumption that credibility as an inherent trait is incorrect. "It denies the whole notion of process and individual differences in perception, attitudes, needs and desires" (p. 140). Thus, a source is credible only if others perceive him as such, and may only be so depending on the time and the state of the receiver.

Communicative behavior and feedback tend to be affected by what is perceived as source credibility. If the source is perceived as being highly credible, the behavior of the receiver tends to follow the desired persuasive direction of the source. Persuasion is more likely to occur when receivers like, trust, and have confidence in the persuader (Verderber and Verderber, 1977).

The dimensions of credibility have been termed in many different ways, but each tends to reflect those previously developed. Though various dimensions have been associated with credibility, some characteristics have been generally agreed upon. McCroskey et al. (1973) has categorized the dimensions of credibility as including perceptions of source extroversion/introversion, composure, competence, character, and sociability. These dimensions underlie perceptions of the source's intelligence, character, and good will, all necessary factors in message acceptance .

Physical Attractiveness and Credibility

A source's physical attractiveness is often used as an independent variable in many areas of communication, psychological, and sociological research. As with credibility, an individual must be perceived by others to possess certain traits for attractiveness to be effective. Since appearance and liking are specific to the receiver and subjective in nature,

it is typical for people who are labeled "attractive" or "unattractive" to be established by consensus. Although different people are attracted to different characteristics, there is usually a stereotypical perception of attractiveness and/or appearance.

Early research suggested that a source's physical attractiveness in a communicative interaction may be an influential factor in establishing credibility. In 1949, Haiman found a significant correlation between physical attractiveness and persuasive success (Widgery, 1974). This study tends to be a bench-mark in attraction/credibility research because the results imply that the more attractive the source, the more persuasive he may be. Much earlier Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1953) found that "when a person is perceived as having a definite intention to persuade others, the likelihood is increased that he will be perceived as having something to gain and hence, as less worthy of trust" (p. 23). These results were challenged in 1965 by Mills and Aronson who suggested that an "overt, frankly stated desire to influence would actually enhance the effectiveness of an attractive communicator" (p. 173). Their results indicated that when the communicator was unattractive, there was no apparent influence on effectiveness even when she announced an intent to persuade. However, when the communicator was attractive, persuasion was enhanced. Mills and Aronson argue that the attractive source may well be more effective in openly changing opinions if the audience perceives that someone they like very much wants them to do so. Thus, the receivers of the message may behave out of a desire to please the attractive source.

Much research has been conducted in the past 20 years which supports the notion that physically attractive people are more influential and persuasive than others. Heckenmueller (1972) argued that "society is biased against uglies and somehow attractive people tend to be more persuasive or wield more influence than plane people" (Malandro and Barker, 1983, p. 40). Huston (1974) voiced support for Mills and Aronson's findings by adding, "A source of persuasive communication is more likely to be perceived as having intent to be impartial and truthful if he is liked, and when altruistic or benevolent

intentions can be attributed to him by the target [audience]" (p. 15). Further, as Jackson and Huston have noted, "Good-looking people, in addition, are stereotyped as possessing more pleasing personalities than those not as attractive as they are" (p. 79). Berscheid and Walster (1972) supported the proposition that attractive people are typically rated higher on variables such as perceived success, personality, persuasiveness, and often happiness. Dion et al. (1972) echoed this finding: attractive people report more fulfilling lives, happier marriages, and prestigious occupations.

The bottom line is that attractive people are perceived to be better people. Attractive people are rated more credible and are less likely to be blamed for bad outcomes and more likely to be held responsible for good outcomes (cf., Eakins and Eakins, 1978; Seligman, Paschall, and Takata, 1974). Further, attractive people are better liked in general than their nonattractive counterparts (Bell and Daly, 1984; Bell, Tremblay, and Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987).

Violating Communicator Expectations

As this body of research indicates, nonverbal cues such as attraction may have an effect on perceptions of both message and source. Some theorists propose, however, that such cues may operate as distractors which mediate perceptions of credibility, attractiveness, and attendant influence (Burgoon, Fraedrich, and Bachman, 1979; Stacks and Burgoon, 1981). It has been suggested that attractiveness may serve as a distractive alteration in the persuasibility of a message if the receiver's expectations about that message's source are violated. This "expectancy hypothesis" has been confirmed in part by McPeek and Edwards (1975) who found that persuasion was enhanced when a source argued for a position different than was expected (they found that a "hippie" delivering an antimarijuana message more was more effective than a seminarian arguing the same message).

The impact of an attractive source may have similar results, or may produce more negative outcomes. An attractive source, other than being perceived as more attractive

and credible in general, may also be perceived as more distractive. As Stacks and Burgoon (1981) noted, "There is modest evidence that positive forms of distractions [attractive people] lead to greater susceptibility to persuasion, while negative distractors [unattractive people]...can lead to more resistance to persuasion" (p. 72). However, attraction may be a double-edged sword. As Hickson and Stacks (1985) argue, too attractive people have the same handicap as the unattractive person: they become stereotyped in a negative way. The cultural truism that beauty and brains cannot occur within the same person may underlie this outcome; it is observed through such labels as "dumb blonde" and "beauty queen." Hence, being too attractive may reduce individual source credibility and persuasiveness; it may also reflect negatively on the organization selecting the source as its PR spokesperson.

Implications and Hypotheses

The implications of this line of research on public relations practice suggest that the practice of including a photograph of the practitioner with the message, especially in the form of a press release or other written format, may produce predictable results. Within reason, attractive practitioners should be more credible than unattractive practitioners. Such attributions also should manifest themselves in the organizations the attractive person represents.

Based on the preceding discussion of physical attraction and credibility in general, and the perception of attractive sources presentation of public relations information, the following hypotheses were derived:

H_1 Perceived physical attractiveness, particularly between the "unattractive" and "attractive" levels, will have an effect on the perceived credibility attributed to the source. Attractive sources will be perceived as more credible.

H_2 Extreme levels of attractiveness, "extremely attractive" and "extremely unattractive" individuals, will cause a decrease in

perceived credibility. Sources whose attraction is in the extreme (high or low) will be perceived less credible and more distractive.

H_3 The relationship between attraction and credibility will be related to perceptions of the organization that the individual is representing. Attractive sources will produce more positive attitudes toward the represented organization than sources whose attraction is either extreme (high or low).

METHOD

To test the hypotheses advanced the study was broken into two phases. First, the photographs representing the public relations practitioners were selected and the message was written; both were then pretested to ensure that appropriate levels of attraction were manipulated and that the message was not biased in any particular way. Second, the actual study was conducted and the data collected.

Stimulus Materials

Photograph selection. Initially, 20 photographs were selected from several hundred by one of the researchers. Five male and five female photographs which appeared to range from very attractive to very unattractive were selected and shown in random order to 20 graduate students who rated each photo on McCroskey and McCain's (1974) measure of peer attraction. The four items concerning physical attraction were then coded and submitted to statistical analysis. To be chosen for inclusion the photographs had to meet two criteria: (1) be significantly different ($p < .05$) from the other two same-sex photographs and (2) be no different ($p > .05$) than the opposite-sex photograph at the same level of attraction. In all, three male and three female photographs were chosen, two who were perceived as being "highly" attractive, two who were "moderately" attractive, and two who were "lowly" attractive -- or unattractive.

Message. Two independent, public relations-type messages were created. Each made reference to "J. Smith" as the spokesperson for the organization represented. One message concerned equivalency exams to be given by the "Department of Continuing Education." The other message involved a cancer screening service sponsored by the state medical association. Each press release was then read and rated by 30 undergraduate mass communication students on 13 semantic differential-like scales. The adjective pairings were: MASCULINE/FEMININE; INTERESTING/UNINTERESTING; CLEAR/UNCLEAR; CONTROVERSIAL/NONCONTROVERSIAL; BLACK/WHITE; FRIENDLY/UNFRIENDLY; ACTIVE/PASSIVE; INFORMATIVE/UNINFORMATIVE; INTENSE/RELAXED; USEFUL/USELESS; BIASED/UNBIASED; OBJECTIVE/SUBJECTIVE; and CHEERFUL/GLOOMY. The ratings were submitted to a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation. To be considered an evaluative factor, two items had to load greater than +/-.55 on that factor and possess no secondary loading greater than +/-.30. Four factors were extracted: "message clarity" (CLEAR/UNCLEAR; ACTIVE/PASSIVE; INFORMATIVE/UNINFORMATIVE; AND BLACK/WHITE), "message strength" (MASCULINE/FEMININE and INTENSE/RELAXED), "message objectivity" (FRIENDLY/UNFRIENDLY and OBJECTIVE/SUBJECTIVE), and "message position" (CONTROVERSIAL/NONCONTROVERSIAL and BIASED/UNBIASED).

Analysis of the releases compared both across the four dimensions. The releases failed to differ on any of the four dimensions. Individual t-tests on the scale items did provide some differences in releases: the cancer message was rated clearer, more useful, less biased, and as taking more of a position than the continuing education message. The continuing education release was chosen as being more neutral on taking a position and for fear of negative connotations with relation to the "cancer" message.

Experimental Study

Subjects. One hundred and forty students enrolled in communication courses at a large southeastern university were asked to evaluate the public relations release reportedly written by either a male or female "J. Smith."

Procedures. Subjects were randomly placed in one of seven groups. Six experimental groups required that subjects read the press release purportedly written by "J. Smith." This release was laid out similar to a newspaper layout for a press release, space not filled by the message was shaded and one of six photographs of "J. Smith" was placed in the upper right corner of the release. A seventh group of subjects served as the control group and read the same release, but this release did not have a photograph of "J. Smith" attached to it.

After reading the release each subject was asked to rate the spokesperson, "J. Smith," on scales measuring source attraction, credibility, and distraction. Additionally, subjects were asked to respond to 10 questions concerning perceptions of the organization sponsoring the press release. Source attraction was measured via McCroskey and McCain's (1974) peer attraction scales. These seven-point semantic differential scales tap perceptions of peer physical, social, and task attraction and have been found to be both reliable and valid. Source credibility was measured by 20 peer credibility scales created by McCroskey, Jensen, and Valencia (1973). These scales tap five dimensions of credibility: character, composure, competence, sociability, and extroversion. This scale has also been demonstrated to be valid and reliable. Distraction was measured by five semantic differential-like scales created by Stacks and Burgoon (1981) which concern the amount of distraction in the situation. Finally, 10 Likert-like statements were generated which pertained to the organization represented to gain understanding of possible "halo effects" or generalizations of source attributions to the organization (see Table 1).

Several demographic questions were asked for later statistical comparisons. Demographic items included age, sex, major, race, and year in school.

RESULTS

Responses to the experimental packets were transcribed and submitted to computer analysis via the SPSS/PC+ computer package. Significance for all analyses was set at an alpha of .05 or less. Results were analyzed via a 2 (sex of source) x 3 (level of attraction) factorial design with off-set control. Of the 140 students serving as subject, nine were disregarded due to failure to respond to the experimental scales, leaving 131 subjects (54 males and 77 females) in the study.

Control Group Comparisons

To test for manipulation effect on source credibility, the six experimental conditions were collapsed and tested against the control group, which read the release without a picture. The means for the control and the experimental group are presented in Table 2. Inspection of the means indicates that for most analyses the differences between groups were minimal. However, significant analyses of variance results were obtained for sociability ($F = 5.33$, $df = 1/129$, $p = .023$) and extroversion ($F = 6.22$, $df = 1/129$, $p = .014$). it became clear that the photographs reduced perceptions of source extroversion and sociability. When further probed via Duncan's Multiple Range Test, the control group only differed in perceptions of sociability from the experimental group which received the highly attractive male photograph and from both the low and high attraction male photograph for extroversion. Although not significant, the experimental groups perceived the source's competence as higher than did the control group.

Hypotheses

To test the three main hypotheses, the data were initially submitted to 2 (sex of source) x 3 (level of attraction) analyses of variance.

Credibility and Attraction. No significant sex of source by attraction interactions were obtained for either set of analyses (see Table 3). However, significant main effects were obtained for sex of source and attraction level. Female sources were perceived as significantly more sociable ($F = 4.24$, $df = 1/105$, $p = .042$) and extroverted ($F = 5.80$, $p = .018$) than male sources. However, male sources were perceived as significantly more attractive ($F = 4.11$, $p = .045$) than were female sources. Attraction main effects were obtained for character ($F = 3.47$, $df = 2/105$, $p = .035$), extroversion ($F = 3.06$, $p = .05$), and attraction ($F = 38.87$, $p < .001$). When probed via Duncan's MRT, highly attractive sources were perceived as possessing less character than moderate or low attractive sources, who did not differ in their character ratings. The moderately attractive source was perceived as significantly more attractive than the lowly attractive source, but did not differ from the highly attractive source. And, in terms of attraction, the highly attractive source was perceived as more attractive than the moderate or low attractive source, who did not differ from each other.

Distraction. A significant sex of source by level of attraction interaction ($F = 3.20$, $df = 1/105$, $p = .045$) was obtained for perceived distraction. Probing of the cell means revealed that the highly attractive ($M = 17.22$) and moderately attractive ($M = 16.25$) male source was significantly more distracting than the lowly attractive ($M = 11.65$) male source. However, the highly and moderately attractive male sources did not differ from each other or from the females, who did not differ from the lowly attractive male.

Organizational Variables. No significant differences were obtained for any of the organizational variables.

Post Hoc Analyses

Analyses of demographic data indicated that the sex of the subject may have served a contributing role in this study. Because of this, and because the literature on violations of nonverbal expectations suggests sex of the subject may be important as a factor in the

reward aspect of a violation (cf., Burgoon, Stacks, and Woodall, 1977; Stacks and Burgoon, 1981), the data were reanalyzed. Three-way analyses of variance (sex of source x sex of subject [reader] x level of attraction) were run on the credibility, attraction, distraction, and organizational variables. (See Table 4.)

Credibility and Attraction. Results of the three-way analyses of variance obtained significant differences for two of the credibility analyses. A significant main effect for sex of the reader ($F = 4.50$, $df = 1/99$, $p = .036$) was obtained whereby male readers rated the source as more composed than did female readers ($M_{male} = 12.35$; $M_{female} = 10.71$). A significant sex of reader x attraction level interaction was obtained for competence ($F = 3.53$, $df = 2/99$, $p = .033$). Male readers perceived the low attractive source as significantly more competent ($M = 14.00$) than females readering either the moderately attractive ($M = 10.59$) or lowly attractive ($M = 10.79$) source's message. Males reading the moderate or highly attractive source did not perceive differences in competence either between themselves or the females, who did not differ from each other.

Distraction. No sex of reader effect was obtained for distraction.

Organizational Variables. The impact of reader sex was most apparent in the organizational variables. Seven of the 10 variables yielded significant main effects or interactions. A main effect were obtained for willingness to associate with the organization ($F = 5.64$, $df = 1/99$, $p = .029$), with male readers less positive about associating with the organization than female readers ($M_{male} = 3.70$; $M_{female} = 2.58$). Additionally, a main effect for organizational usefulness was obtained, but was overridden by the three-way interaction.

One variable, whether the reader could depend on the organization, produced a significant sex of reader x level of attraction interaction ($F = 6.09$, $df = 2/99$, $p = .003$). Female readers viewing both male and female unattractive sources ($M = 2.75$) saw the

organization as less dependable than males reading the moderately (M=3.69) or unattractive (M=3.71) sources and females reading attractive sources (M=3.89).

Several variables obtained significant sex of reader x sex of source interactions. For organizational honesty, females reading female spokespersons rated the organization as significantly (F=7.05, df=1/99, p=.03) less honest (M=2.56) than females reading male sources (M=3.27) and males reading female sources (M=3.25). Males reading male sources were not significantly different from any other condition. Females reading male sources perceived the organization as significantly (F=4.30, p=041) more positive to work for (M=3.57) than did females who read the female source (M=2.75). Perceptions of organizational competency were also found to differ significantly (F=7.85, p=.006). Females reading male sources viewed the organization as more competent (M=3.33) than females reading female sources (M=2.47). Perceptions of the overall impression of the organization were significant (F=5.73, p=.019) with males reading female sources being more positive (M=3.33) than males reading male sources (M=2.50) or females reading female sources (M=2.46). Females reading male sources did not differ from any other condition.

Finally, the variable measuring organizational usefulness produced a significant three-way interaction (F=5.23, df=2/99, p=.007). Females reading a highly attractive female source rated the organization as less useful (M=1.42) than females reading the unattractive male (M=2.89) or males reading either the moderately attractive male (M=3.00) or the highly attractive female (M=4.37). Males reading the highly attractive female (M=4.37) rated the organization as significantly more useful than readers in any other condition.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between source credibility and physical attractiveness on written messages in the field of public relations. The primary purpose

was to test the influence of perceived PR spokesperson and organizational credibility as mediated by that practitioner's physical attractiveness. The results of the experimental manipulations provided some support for the relationship between attractiveness and perceptions of source credibility, perceptions which also transferred themselves to more general perceptions of the organization the PR spokesperson represented. However, the results were equivocal in many ways.

Credibility, Attraction, Distraction

The results of this study point out that use of photographs, when used to specifically enhance the spokesperson's credibility, may not be most effective way to boost that credibility. The results of the experimental-control group comparisons indicate that only two of the five credibility dimensions produced significantly different perceptions of credibility, and these dimensions related less to competence, composure, or character than to perceptions of sociability (likableness) and extroversion. Further, when probed, these effects appeared only for the highly attractive male, perhaps reflecting a clear violation of reader expectations. Of the nonsignificant findings, the pattern of means for competence alone indicated that a photograph may enhance credibility.

The attraction level and the spokesperson's sex appear to be less related than previously thought. Only main effects were obtained. When considering the sex of the spokesperson, females were perceived as more sociable and extroverted, again more non-knowledge related dimensions. However, males were perceived as more attractive than were females, again perhaps a function of a positive violation of expectation or a perception that attractive people in general do represent organizations. For attraction, a clear violations explanation seems appropriate: highly attractive spokespersons were perceived as less credible than moderately or lowly attractive spokespersons.

Although neither attractiveness nor sex of spokesperson seem to enhance or detract from source credibility ratings, the interactive impact of the variables did result in some interesting findings. Males were perceived as more attractive than females; however,

when the analyses were conducted on the distraction variable, the attractive male was perceived as more distracting than any of the other message sources. From an expectancy violations perspective, in public relations, while male spokespersons are expected to be attractive to a degree, they are only distractive when representing the high end of the attractiveness continuum. Perhaps the findings of no distraction for female spokespersons represent a more accepting role of women in the field of public relations or perhaps an apathy -- or expectation or stereotype of what the female should look like --where women are the representatives.

The results of spokesperson sex and level of attraction on the organizational variables failed to produce any significant findings. It may be that, when considered in the total situation, the message was more important than the organization. However, it was in these analyses that the sex of the reader became an unexpected factor in this study.

Post Hoc Analyses

The addition of the reader's sex into the study provides additional insight into the process by which readers perceive both the PR spokesperson and the organization he or she represents. First, for the credibility and attraction analyses, male readers perceived the spokesperson as more composed than did female readers. Second, an interaction was obtained between sex of reader and the spokesperson's attraction level. Again, it was the male who rated the message as more credible (competent), but only for the lowly attractive spokesperson, than females rating the moderate or highly attractive spokesperson. The addition of reader sex did not affect the distraction analyses.

Where the addition of reader sex did make a difference was in the analysis of organizational perception. Of the 10 variables analyzed, seven produced significant differences. The impact of reader sex, however, was not as strong as thought, as evidenced by the single interpretable main effect. Rather, reader sex interacted with attraction level and/or spokesperson sex. In general, it appears that females reading male sources were more positive toward the organization than females reading female sources. This pattern

of opposite-sex interaction (male-female) generally resulted in better perceptions of the organization than for same-sex interaction (male-male; female-female). It may be that the opposite-sex combinations provided a more rewarding "interaction" between spokesperson and reader, a finding that was then generalized to the organization.

CONCLUSIONS

Previous research has suggested that credibility is related to the degree of physical attractiveness associated with the message source. The results of this study, however, suggest that for public relations practitioners, the relationships are more complex. For instance, the messages which had a photograph in the layout produced a reduction in general or no difference for certain credibility dimensions. And, if there was any enhancement, it was in social perception, not necessarily content perception.

An underlying assumption of this research was that the attraction level of the spokesperson would provide some form of positive distraction, if that level were not too high or low. That highly attractive male spokespersons were found distractive is generally supportive of this line of logic. However, for the female spokesperson, no distractive impact was found. It may be that males are expected to be less attractive than their female counterparts and the highly attractive male "pays the price" for his good looks. On the other hand, the highly attractive female may not be perceived as highly attractive when that perception is associated with her message. The pretest for attraction indicated that the male and female were at the same level of attraction -- but the pretest sample viewed the photographs in isolation; readers of the message had to incorporate both verbal and nonverbal factors. Further research is needed to explore the public relations impact of attractiveness across other forms of communication, such as interpersonal and television/motion picture appeals where the spokesperson's physical attraction may be a factor.

Based on the results of this study, future research could include a more widespread study on the general publics which would be likely to receive a message. Results of such an experiment could then be compared to those obtained here. Similar findings may give public relations practitioners insight into the most effective format to use in a print situation to increase the perceived credibility of not only the spokesperson, but also the organization he or she represents.

A second area of concern is the sex of the public exposed to the message. Based on this study, it would appear that more research on audience demographics, when the sex and attractiveness of the spokesperson is considered, is necessary. The reward explanation (opposite-sex interaction being rewarding, same-sex interaction being non-rewarding) is one approach which merits further examination. It may be that there are stereotypes of what the "normal" male and female PR practitioner looks like. Research demonstrating what these norms are could shed additional light into the complex relationship between spokesperson, reader, and perceptions of credibility.

Finally, the results of this study may serve as a foundation for a new area of research for the effects of perceived physical attractiveness of the public relations practitioner on the attributions of source credibility made by his or her various publics. It might be beneficial for the public relations professional to utilize the most effective communication methods in establishing initial personal credibility, whether that be more content-oriented (and perhaps strategically use of photograph with the release) or more socially-oriented (and strategically inclusive of a photograph). Given that there is no commonly accepted definition of public relations, it is important that credibility be rated highly by the various publics the PR practitioner must deal with. Perhaps more research on factors such as attraction, distraction, and sex of the public most likely to be communicated with can provide insight that the professional needs to manipulate the public's perceptions of the spokesperson's and organization's credibility.

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TABLE 1

ORGANIZATIONAL VARIABLES

	Statement
1.	I have a positive attitude toward the organization
2.	It would be a positive experience to work with the organization.
3.	I could depend on the organization.
4.	It would be difficult associating with the organization.
5.	The organization would be poor at problem solving.
6.	The organization is competent.
7.	The organization is active.
8.	The organization is honest.
9.	The work done by the organization is useful.
10.	I have a good general feeling about the organization.

TABLE 2

MEANS FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

Variable	Control	Experimental
Competence	9.60	11.23
Composure	11.75	11.39
Character	11.10	11.80
Sociability	13.10	11.05
Extroversion	12.85	10.21

TABLE 3

MEANS FOR ATTRACTIVENESS AND SPOKESPERSON SEX

Attractiveness:	Low		Mod		High	
Sex:	M	F	M	F	M	F
Variable						
Composure	10.65	13.39	10.80	12.17	11.11	10.35
Character	10.29	10.50	12.35	12.22	13.44	11.85
Competence	10.65	9.94	11.10	11.67	13.06	11.00
Sociability	9.24	11.94	10.80	12.17	10.83	11.20
Extroversion	8.29	11.72	11.40	11.44	7.83	10.30
Attraction	12.72	11.15	15.40	11.56	21.29	21.28
Distraction	11.65	15.95	16.25	15.00	17.22	14.35
Attitude	3.06	2.89	2.70	3.17	2.94	3.00
Pos. Exper.	3.00	2.78	3.00	3.22	3.17	3.25
Depend	3.59	3.39	2.90	3.39	3.39	2.85
Associating	3.12	3.33	3.55	3.50	2.89	3.25
Prob. Solv.	3.12	3.06	2.40	3.06	3.33	3.15
Competence	3.12	2.78	2.95	3.00	3.06	2.60
Activity	2.47	2.89	2.85	2.72	2.56	2.75
Honesty	3.00	3.11	3.40	2.83	2.72	2.65
Usefulness	2.59	2.33	2.45	2.39	2.28	2.60
Affect	2.59	2.89	2.55	2.78	2.89	2.85

TABLE 4

MEANS FOR ATTRACTIVENESS, SPOKESPERSON SEX, AND READER SEX

Attractiveness:	Low		Mod		High	
Spokesperson Sex:	M	F	M	F	M	F
Variable/ Sex of Reader						
Composure						
M	11.33	11.00	12.25	9.83	10.63	10.67
F	12.38	9.00	12.13	12.20	15.13	12.00
Character						
M	15.00	12.67	12.25	13.24	9.13	11.33
F	12.38	11.50	12.25	12.20	11.63	9.60
Competence						
M	15.17	12.00	12.25	10.33	7.88	13.11
F	13.13	9.58	12.63	10.90	10.50	9.50
Sociability						
M	11.83	10.33	11.25	10.50	7.88	10.44
F	13.00	10.00	12.38	12.00	12.88	11.20
Extroversion						
M	9.00	7.25	13.25	10.17	7.75	8.78
F	11.25	9.67	11.75	11.20	12.25	11.30
Attraction						
M	14.17	12.00	16.63	14.58	21.13	21.44
F	12.13	10.50	10.00	12.80	20.75	21.70
Distraction						
M	19.17	16.25	16.63	16.00	11.75	11.56
F	15.88	13.33	15.88	14.70	16.13	15.80
Attitude						
M	2.67	3.08	2.75	2.67	2.88	3.22
F	4.13	2.25	3.00	3.30	2.63	3.10
Pos. Exper.						
M	3.00	3.25	3.25	2.83	2.63	3.33
F	4.38	2.50	3.50	3.00	2.75	2.80
Depend						
M	3.33	3.42	3.63	2.42	3.00	4.11
F	4.00	2.08	3.75	3.10	3.00	3.70
Associating*						
M	2.83	2.93	4.00	3.25	3.13	3.11
F	4.25	2.58	4.00	3.10	3.75	3.00
Prob. Solv.*						
M	3.33	3.33	2.50	2.33	2.75	3.44
F	3.50	2.92	3.25	2.80	3.00	2.60
Competence						
M	3.17	3.00	2.38	3.33	2.38	3.78
F	3.38	2.08	3.25	2.80	3.00	2.60
Activity						
M	2.67	2.50	2.50	3.08	1.75	3.11
F	3.50	2.25	2.75	2.70	2.75	3.00

*Lower score reflects a more positive response.

Honesty						
M	2.67	2.75	2.88	3.75	2.63	3.33
F	3.50	2.08	3.00	2.70	3.25	3.00
Usefulness						
M	2.17	2.33	3.00	2.08	2.25	2.89
F	4.38	1.42	2.50	2.30	2.50	2.20
Affect						
M	2.50	3.08	2.75	2.42	2.25	2.89
F	4.13	2.00	3.13	2.50	2.75	3.00